

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Laura Whitman  
(513) 564-0700

## **MSD LAUNCHES PROGRAM TO RESOLVE WATER-IN-BASEMENT PROBLEMS**

### ***WIB Response Program Initiated as Part of Global Consent Decree***

Cincinnati, Jan. 2, 2004 – The Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati (MSD) has launched its Water-In-Basement (WIB) Response Program, effective Jan. 1, 2004. The program provides much-needed cleanup assistance to customers who experience basement backups, includes reimbursements for property damage and enables MSD to install measures to prevent wastewater backups in basements.

“Our goal is no more basement backups. Period,” said MSD Director Patrick Karney, P.E., DEE. “Through this new program, MSD can now help customers who experience sewer backups and proactively protect them from future damage. The program will improve the services we currently offer customers and help us continue to be good stewards of our community and environment.”

The WIB Response Program addresses all basement backup situations caused by the public sewer system such as backflows resulting from inadequate capacity. WIBs resulting from overland flooding (which occurs when stormwater floods into homes and businesses) or by blockages in a private sewer line are beyond MSD’s control and therefore not covered through the WIB Response Program.

The WIB Response Program is comprised of three primary elements: a Customer Service Program, a Claims Process and a WIB Prevention Program.

### **CUSTOMER SERVICE PROGRAM**

The Customer Service Program is designed to clean up the immediate effects of wastewater backups from MSD’s sewer system into customers’ homes and businesses. As part of the program, MSD will establish a Call Center staffed by a team of service personnel 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Customers can call (513) 352-4900 to report a WIB occurrence. Within a few hours of receiving an initial report, MSD will have a service representative on site to assess the situation and initiate the next steps.

If the WIB is caused by a problem with the public sewer system, MSD will immediately send a team to clean up the property at no charge to the occupant. Basic cleanup services generally will include:

- Wet vacuuming or other removal of spillage
- Mopping bare floors with cleaning solution and disinfectant
- Wiping walls with cleaning solution and disinfectant
- Flushing out and disinfecting plumbing fixtures
- Disposal of damaged and contaminated goods such as carpeting, furniture and other items

“No two situations are exactly alike,” said Dennis Madden, Manager of the WIB Customer Service program. “As such, MSD will assess each individual situation and determine the most appropriate cleanup measures for that location.”

After the cleanup, MSD will provide each property owner with a telephone number to call if they have further questions or need further assistance. MSD also will provide property owners with information on how to minimize future losses until preventative measures can be installed. If it is determined during the site visit that MSD is not at fault for a backup, the customer service representative will provide the property owner or occupant with instructions for safe cleanup, general prevention information, and referrals to local organizations that can provide further assistance.

“MSD will inspect each and every WIB report it receives and in a very timely manner,” confirmed Madden.

### **CLAIMS PROCESS**

Property owners who experience a WIB can be reimbursed for their losses through the WIB Claims Process. The claims process will cover most damages to personal and physical property caused by the public sewer system.

To be reimbursed for damages caused by a WIB, property owners must:

- Notify MSD within 24 hours of discovering the WIB. Notification can be made by calling the MSD Call Center at (513) 352-4900.
- Allow MSD and/or its contractors reasonable access to the affected property in order to investigate the cause of the WIB and document the losses.
- File and submit a claim form. MSD will provide claim forms to property owners when they visit the affected property. Claim forms also will be available on the MSD Web site at [www.msdbg.org](http://www.msdbg.org) and at the Call Center.

“All claims must be documented in detail and MSD will play an active role in this portion of the process,” said Madden. Documentation is likely to include taking photographs of the damaged property, preparing an inventory of the damaged items, and compiling information about the value, age, type and other characteristics of items lost. “We will assist property owners as much as we can through this process. However, MSD cannot file claims for the property owners – the property owners must take on and manage that responsibility.”

All claims will be submitted to the Office of the Solicitor for the City of Cincinnati and the City will address all claims within 60 days. Any claims denied or not fully compensated will be explained and will include instructions for pursuing the claim further in the Ohio State court.

In an effort to manage future claims on the same property, MSD may request that property owners already compensated under the claims program allow MSD to install at MSD’s expense WIB prevention measures. Property occupants also should refrain from installing new carpet and drywall or storing personal property below a previously documented high water line until prevention measures have been installed.

### **WIB PREVENTION PROGRAM**

Through the WIB Prevention Program, MSD will purchase and install systems or devices that will prevent wastewater from backing up into the basements of eligible properties. Eligibility will be based on a variety of factors including:

- History of WIB occurrences at the property
- History of WIBs in the neighborhood
- Condition of the neighborhood's sewer system and capacity of nearby sewer lines
- Results of a visual inspection to look for signs of overland flooding in the area
- Inspection of the property's private sewer line and/or of the nearby public sewer line

"We will be very proactive in working to prevent WIB situations," said MSD Deputy Director Bob Campbell, P.E., DEE. "We are starting by developing a comprehensive list of homes and buildings that have experienced WIBs and will use it to guide our efforts. All properties that experienced a WIB in the last five years and were reported to us are already on the list. However, if property owners have not reported a previous WIB, I strongly encourage them to contact us and register their properties so they can be included on our list." Properties can be registered through the MSD Call Center or web site.

MSD will investigate each reported WIB location. Properties will be prioritized on a "worst first" basis and MSD will initially focus on properties that have experienced or are most likely to experience multiple WIBs. The WIB solutions installed will vary depending on the needs of each location, however, technologies most likely to be used include:

- Backflow Preventers – mechanical devices installed in the private sewer line that allows wastewater to flow away from the property but block wastewater from flowing into the property and backing up into the basement.
- Pumping Systems – systems that break the direct connection between a property's private sewer line and the public main line sewer. Instead, wastewater from the property is redirected to a holding tank and is then pumped into the mainline sewer using a motorized pump.
- Capacity Increases – the installation of larger sewer lines in a neighborhood.

As a last resort where no feasible cost-effective alternative exists, MSD will consider purchasing the property.

"Our goal is to address all the reported WIBs and have prevention measures in place within five years," said Campbell. "This is an aggressive goal, but it's one we are determined to fulfill and one that shows our commitment to providing our customers with the best service possible."

The WIB Response Program is a component of the proposed Global Consent Decree that was approved by Hamilton County and the City of Cincinnati on Nov. 26, 2003 and lodged with the United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, Western Division on Dec. 3, 2003. Although a final decision on the Decree by state and federal government is not expected until later in 2004, MSD is proceeding with the implementation of the Water-In-Basement Response Program to ensure its customers' needs are met.

###

*Every day, the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati (MSD) manages the effective collection and treatment of more than 200 million gallons of wastewater and actively maintains 3,000 miles of sanitary and combined sewers that run through the 49 municipalities and townships of Hamilton County. Owned by Hamilton County and operated by the City of Cincinnati, MSD is committed to continually maintaining and improving its wastewater collection and treatment systems for the betterment of both public and environmental health.*